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A PLACE WHERE THE

OF THE GROUND !



MAKE IT OVER INTO A PLACE WHERE FOLKS CAN HOLD MEETINGS A WORTHY PROJECT! BUT HOW DO YOU AIM TO GET RICH ENOUGH TO DOIT?

THIS GAMBLING HALL! I'LL

SEE THIS HERE MAP? LET'S HAVE SHOWS HOW TO REACH DINNER TOGETHER. LAND'S SO RICH IN OIL OLD-TIMER! YOU CAN TELL ME ALL ABOUT





























































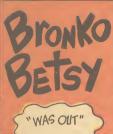


























WESLEY CUTS THE HERD By Hank Spector

approach of the dust cloud that hung like a distant haze upon the cattle trail. By the size of the cloud he knew that it was created by a large herd. In this hot, dry country he did not envy the trail riders their task of keeping the cattle together and on the move. Well, it was every man to his own job—and Wesley's job was neither easy nor earning of appreciation. He patted his breast pocket, to be sure that the papers were there. Then he hitched his belt and glanced down to see that his guns hung loose and ready. He had a feeling that this outfit would be hard to handle.

The moving cloud had come close enough now so that the trotting cattle were dimly visible through the haze that their hoofs were churning up out of the powdery earth. With low-hanging heads and wide-spreading horns, they poured steadily across the mesa, in a living, tumultuous ribbon. Wesley judged that there must be well over a thousand head of cattle in the herd.

The man riding the left point, who was apparently the straw boss, kneed his pony up to Wesley. His dust-caked face showed the strain of nursing the cattle over the long trail. Under the grime he had a stubble of black beard. His nose was wide and flattened, and the eyes which regarded Wesley with unconcealed hostility were small and red-rimmed.

"Howdy," Wesley said pleasantly. "Things going all right?"

The rider pulled a small sack of tobacco from his shirt pocket, and with a practised hand rolled a cigarette. "Any concern of yours?" he asked, peering over cupped hands while he lit up.

"Sure," Wesley replied. "I'm the trail cutter."
"That's a crying shame!" the rider replied
with mock sympathy, as he turned his mount

away.
"Hold on!" Wesley called. "I aim to cut your herd—Lipian."

The man twisted in the saddle to face him. "I haven't forgotten you either," he said. "You're the smart boy who tried to have us stopped last year. But we went through."

"I was trying to help the cutter then," Wesley said. "This year I'm the trail cutter! And this year the job will be done!"

"You won't touch my herd!" Lipian gritted.

"I'm behind schedule now, and we're going right on through!"

"I'm sorry if you're late," Wesley said placatingly. "I know how cantankerous these critters can be. But it's my job to cut out any strays that might have joined your herd in this state.

"Here are my papers," he added, holding them out for the rider's inspection. "These are the brands I'm looking for. Cattle with these brands don't belong in your herd."

Lipian flicked his eyes over the row of cattle brands, and at the state seal at the bottom of the document. "It's right pretty," he commented, "but as I told you, I'm not interested!"

Wesley returned the papers to his pocket. Tension seemed to crackle between the two men. "You must have a reason for resisting a lawful inspection of your cattle," Wesley said coldly.

"My reason is that you fellows are a nuisance," the rider blustered. "Even if your papers are genuine, your authority covers only this state. As soon as we cross the San Juan we'll be out of your reach."

Two flank riders had come up in the meantime, halting on each side of the trail cutter. They seemed even more disreputable than their leader. Their horses showed little sign of having been care' for. Wesley noted out of the corner of his eye that each of the new mounts bore a different brand. This was a ragtail outfit that certainly needed inspection. He tried to ignore the way in which the men had boxed him in.

"You're right about the state line," he said.
"But there'll be plenty of time to cut your head.
It will be dark in about two hours, and you should be bedding down for the night. In the morning, about two hours' drive should bring you to the badlands. Then, with luck, another hour should see you through to the San Juan River."

The trail boss sneered. "You've got it all figured out, huh? And where did you aim to cut the herd?"

"There's a natural spot for it, about the middle of the badland strip," Wesley said. "The trail goes through a long gulley, where the cattle can't move more than two abreast. I can check them as they come out, and separate those that don't belong in your herd."

"If you think you're cutting any cattle out of my herd, you're crazy," Lipian said. He waved to his men to precede him.

The young trail cutter dropped his hand to

the butt of his forty-five.

The straw boss stiffened. "I wouldn't pull that, Sonny," he said tensely. "I don't care who you think you are—you can't buck a whole trail outfit."

"I have a job to do," Wesley replied grimly.
"I intend to cut your herd, even if I have to ride back to town to get a sheriff and a couple of deputies."

"Sure, pardner, you do just that," the rider said. He burst into a loud guffaw and loped his horse after his outfit.

Wesley reflectively rubbed his chin. The man had something up his sleeve. It would take Wesley about three hours to get back to town, and that long, plus another hour or two of hard riding, to get to the cutting out spot in the badlands. These cow waddies, tough as they seemed, would never resist three or four armed lawmen. Suddenly, Wesley knew what they intended doing. They meant to push the herd all night! By so doing, they would be across the state line before Wesley could return with enough force to back up his authority.

Wesley had to go through with what he had started. He would have to make his play alone! He pointed his horse away from the trail and made a wide circle around the moving herd. Night fell as he rode, but he knew the country well and was able to maintain a steady pace over the rolling range. When he had put the cattle outfit well behind him, he returned to the trail and continued on his way.

The rising moon cast weird shadows across the rugged badlands. Wesley pushed along the trail until he came to the gulley where he intended to face the cattle outfit. He hobbled his horse and settled down to wait, rolling and smoking one cigarette after another. The joke would be on him, he realized, if they had bedded down for the night, for then he would have thrown away the chance to ride for help. But they did come, before another hour had passed. The stillness of the night was broken by the bawling of nervous cattle, expressing their resentment at being pushed through the night without rest. The point rider loomed in the moonlight.

Wesley rose to greet him, blocking the en-

trance to the canyon. It was Lipian.

"I didn't think you would be fool enough to try it," the man said.

"I'm doing my job," Wesley replied. "You're not driving one head of cattle through this canyon tonight. Pull them off the trail and bed them down, and I'll inspect them in the morning."

The herd had meanwhile drawn nearer, and began to bunch together, as the lead cattle hesitated to approach the figures that blocked their way. A man on foot was an especially threatening phenomenon, and the trigger-nerved steers tossed their heads in near panic.

A second rider came up. "What's holding us

up?" he asked fretfully. "The critters are ready to spook. If they break here, we'll never be able to hold them!"

"Get on your horse and get out of the way,

trail cutter," Lipian ordered.

"And if I refuse to move?" Wesley asked. He was stalling for time, trying to bluff the man, desperately seeking some inspiration.

"If you won't move, you'll stay here, lyin' flat," Lipian cried. He swung his horse around, pulled his gun, and leaned over in an attempt to club Wesley with the butt.

Wesley leaped back against the rock wall. He knew Lipian would not dare to shoot, for a shot would stampede his cattle. It was then Wesley had his inspiration! He drew his gun in a flash. His first bullet struck Lipian's hand, disarming him. The next five bullets were discharged into the air, each shot booming through the canyon like a thunder clap. The noise was swallowed up in the panic-stricken bellows of the stampeding herd.

SEVERAL other riders who had come up to support their leader wheeled their ponies in consternation, to see the heaving mass of cattle breaking from the trail and pouring into the sage brush and gullies of the badlands.

Wesley leisurely mounted his horse, while Lipian cursed him in impotent fury. "You stampeded my cattle!" he stormed.

Wesley smiled coldly. "I'm doing my duty," he said. "I'll be back after daybreak with the sheriff and a couple of men. We'll help you round up the herd. But you'll get only your heads—understand?"





NHHHH!













JUST THE SAME, I WANT A BIGGER SPITT OR 1LL
LEAVE A NOTE FERT HE SHERRIFF TELLING HIM THE
TRITH ABOUT WHO'S BEHIND THESE STAGE
ROBBERIES!

N THAT CASE, I
HONOT AND A
AT ALL!























































S RED JONAS DIVERTS THE OTHERS WITH HIS STORY ...

THAT'LL BE ENOUGH, GENTS! THROW DOWN YOUR GUNS AND IT'S THE







I RECKON THEY'LL MR. HALE BELIEVE YOUR I'M NEVER STORY THIS TIME GOING TO JONAS! THAT TOUCH A DEAD MAN BACK DROP OF LIQUOR THERE IS PROOF AGAIN! FROM NOW ON, I'M ENOUGH! TRUTHFULLEST HOM-

RE IN THESE PARTS!

A GOOD IDEA JONAS! BUT THAT LAST STORY YOU MADE UP HELPED US CATCH JOHN ALLAN AND HIS GUNSLINGERS











































































RECKON I'LL STORE THESE SMOKEPOLES OVER THEY LEAVE THE DINING RO ... HEY!

I KNOW THAT FELLER!





















THAT STEAMBOAT WILL MOVE FAST THROUGH THESE WATERS! THEY'RE SAID TO BE INFESTED WITH RIVER PIRATES! BUT THERE'S STILL ONE HOPE OF CATCHING UP!



































LA QMENTS LATER

YOU BEAT HIM TO THE DRAW! WHY DID YOU SHOOT AT THE CHANDELIER? SEEMS TO ME YOU TOOK A LONG CHANCE!

I DIONIT
WANT TO
SHOOT THIS GUN
OUT OF HIS
HAND! I'VE
BEEN AFTER
IT TOO LONG
TO LET ANY HARM
COME TO IT

NOW I

DOCK AT THE NEXT TOWN; CAPTAIN! WE'VE GOT SOME OCCUPANTS FOR A JAIL! I'LL GO SAY HELLO TO PARONER! HE'S SWIMMING ALONGSIDE.



HE HELPED CAPTURE A GANG
OF RIVER PIRATTES, CHASED A
MURDEROUS DESPERADO, AND
RISKED HIS LIFE A DOZEN TIMES
TO GET THAT GUN BACK! ANYBODY WHO TRIES TO TAKE IT
AWAY FROM HIM AGAIN WILL





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